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BAYUD ADLAM

Acar Jahe untuk Sang Nabi

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****PROLOGUE**

Ginger Pickle for the Prophet**

Monsoon rain fell gently on the coastal village of Tellicherry. The tin roofs reflected a soft sound, like the distant tinkling of fingers on a tabla. On the veranda of his two-century-old wooden house, **Musonnif Khan,** a man in his late sixties, sat cross-legged, arranging the pages of an ancient manuscript before him.

In front of him sat a **young man—Asrovin Taro,** his student and a young researcher hungry for stories. His eyes glowed like a newly lit oil lamp.

“Teacher,” Asrovin said quietly, “you promised to tell me a story not written in books, a story about spices, the sea, and a king. A story you said… the most fragrant of all stories.”

Musonnif Khan smiled—the smile of someone who had long kept a story hidden in his chest, waiting for the right time to open it.

“It smells good, doesn’t it,” he said. “This story does indeed begin with a scent. The scent of ginger. But not just any ginger. Ginger from a time when kings still read the heavens, and sailors sang the direction of the wind.”

He unrolled an old Arabic and Malayalam manuscript. The black ink had faded, but the letters remained firm, like a memory that refused to be forgotten.

“Asrovin,” he said, looking the young man straight in the eye, “do you know what *inji uppilittathu is?”*

“Salted ginger pickle,” Asrovin answered quickly.

Musonnif nodded.

“That's right. This pickled ginger isn't just a side dish for sailors. Once upon a time, pickled ginger served as *a diplomatic gift.* It crossed the sea, weathered the monsoon, and arrived at the home of a prophet in a distant land.”

Asrovin held his breath. He didn't yet know where this story would go, but he knew Musonnif Khan never started a story without a reason.

“This story,” Musonnif continued, “begins long before the modern port existed. When Muziris was still the pearl of the Indian Ocean. When the Chera kingdom was still ruled by a king named… *Shakarvatÿ Farmad.”*

He covered the script, as if asking Asrovin to really listen.

“That night,” he said, his voice low, “the moon split.”

Asrovin blinked. “Split?”

"Yes. That moon you see every night—on one ancient night—split in two in the Malabar sky. And a king, from the balcony of his palace overlooking the Periyar River, saw it with his own eyes."

Musonnif closed his eyes for a moment, as if he was re-watching the incident.

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“King Farmad was troubled. He summoned all the experts—priests, brahmins, Buddhist monks, astrologers, Arab sailors—but none could explain the meaning of the light that split the sky.”

He opened his eyes again.

"And that's how the journey began. Not a ship journey, but a journey of the heart of a king who thirsts for truth."

Asrovin leaned forward, completely captivated.

“Then what happened to the pickled ginger, Master?” he asked in a half-whisper.

Musonnif Khan smiled faintly.

“Pickled ginger,” he said quietly, “is a bridge between two worlds: the spice-soaked world of Malabar and the pure-hearted world of the Hijaz. From the hands of a ginger processor named Abhaya, to the hands of a Prophet who ate it piece by piece.”

He tidied up the manuscript, closed it gently, then looked straight into Asrovin's face.

“Now listen carefully, Asrovin Taro. Because from this point on, the story is no longer mine.
This story… belongs to time.”

The rain was getting heavier. The oil lamp was flickering.

“This,” said Musonnif, “is the story of *Pickled Ginger for the Prophet.”*

And slowly, the story begins…

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****CHAPTER 1**

Muziris: The City of Spices and Ginger Pickles**

The remnants of the monsoon rain were still dripping in the backyard of **Kodungallur Palace,** when **Mÿtrÿga Valiya Thÿrattil Abhaya** walked into the royal kitchen. The air in the room was thick with the aroma of young ginger, Malabar black pepper, and coconut oil heated slowly on a stone stove.

Abhaya, a man in his fifties with graying hair at the temples, stopped in front of the teak table where his ginger roots were arranged. He examined each root one by one—
rubbing the thin skin, weighing the fragrance of the base, and recalling the harvest season that most determines the taste.
For Abhaya, **each ginger root is history that grows underground.**

That day was not an ordinary day.

He received an order: **to make the best pickled ginger that the royal kitchen had ever produced,** a gift for a noble guest in a faraway land—a man whose name was starting to be mentioned by the Arab traders who came to Muziris.

“Prophet from Yathrib,” they said.
“A person trusted by the heavens.”

Abhaya didn't understand everything, but he did know one thing: if his gingerbread was going to embark on a journey across the ocean, he had to make it as precise as possible. He took a wootz iron knife made by **Koÿÿan Ilamkulam Govindan,** the palace potter and forgemaster.[1]

With a movement he'd practiced for decades, he sliced the ginger as thin as the morning light. Each slice fell into a clay vessel —*kalasam*— coated with pure coconut oil. In the corner of the kitchen, large jars **of bharani** stood like guardians of time.

“Abhaya Asan,” called a teenage kitchen assistant, “The king asked that this pickle be ready before the full moon.”

Abhaya nodded. He hadn't said anything, but deep down he knew: **the full moon wasn't just any date.**

The full moon reminds us of the night when—according to sailors—the moon **in the sky broke in** two.[2]

He still remembers when the news arrived: sailors from Hadhramaut and Oman swore that they saw him in the middle of the sea.
And more than anyone else, **King Shakarwati Farmad** himself witnessed it from the terrace of his palace.

Abhaya held the ginger slice for a moment, staring at its golden color.

“This pickle,” he muttered softly, “will become an heirloom not only in the land of Malabar.”

He pours coconut oil into a vessel, then adds **tamarind, black mustard seeds, Cherai sea salt, palm sugar from Chalakudy, and freshly picked curry leaves.**
As soon as the vessel is covered with white cotton cloth and tied with coconut fiber, the warm aroma of ginger fills the room—a scent that will cross oceans.

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Meanwhile, outside the kitchen, the palace was bustling with activity.

Govardhana Koya, the court astrologer, is revising the monsoon wind map.
Devan Namboothiri, a court brahmin, had a heated discussion with **Ananda Tirtha,** a Buddhist monk from Vanchi, about the meaning of the celestial sign the king had seen.
And at the port of Muziris, **Sulaiman al-Kodungalluri,** an Arab trader who had lived for a long time in Malabar, inspected a large ship that was about to depart for Yathrib—the ship on which the pickled ginger would be carried.[3]

Muziris itself is like a pulsating little world.
Gujarati sailors screamed about the price of pepper.
Nair women carry baskets of young ginger on their heads.
Tamil traders transport silk cloth.
And in the distance, the bells of a Hindu temple ring, responding to the chanting of monks at dusk.

Amidst the hustle and bustle, Abhaya brought his vessel to the cooling room.
He looked at the clay jug as if he were looking at his own child.

"Go," he said to himself.
"And hopefully it reaches the right person."

He did not know—did not yet know—that the ginger vessel would one day be in the hands of a prophet.
And that the gingerbread he made would become part of a story that would be repeated centuries later.

A story that one day… will be retold by Musonnif Khan to his student, Asrovin Taro.

FOOTNOTE

[1] Ilamkulam Govindan is a fictional character, but the technique of making wootz (Indian steel) knives has been known and exported to the Middle East since ancient times. See: Ranganathan, S. *Indian Wootz Steel: An Ancient Technology.* Chennai: IIT Press, 1998.

[2] The story of the splitting of the moon is recorded in Islamic tradition and mentioned in classical sources. See: Friedmann, Yohanan. *Qiÿÿat Shakarwatÿ Farmad: A Tradition Concerning the Introduction of Islam to Malabar.* Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975; also Al-ÿabarÿ, *Tarikh al-Rusul wa al-Mulÿk,* volume on the miracles of the Prophet.

[3] Arab traders in Muziris are a historical fact. See: KA Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India.* Oxford: OUP, 1955; comparable to Zayn al-Dÿn al-Ma'barÿ's account in *Tuhfat al-Mujÿhidÿn* of Arab–Malabar trade.

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****CHAPTER 2**

The Night When the Moon Splits**

Night descended slowly over Muziris like a black silk curtain drawn from the sky. A humid breeze from the Indian Ocean carried the scent of the sea and the damp forest. On the highest balcony **of Kodungallur Palace, King Shakarvati Farmad** stood tall, gazing at the sky.

In the distance, the Periyar River dwindled to a silvery line, and the torchlights on the wharf swayed in the breeze. The palace guards stood still, as if sensing something they didn't yet understand.

The king was restless that night.
For years he had studied the sky. He knew full moons, eclipses, the paths of the stars, and the signs of the seasons. But that night, he felt something different.

He looked up at the full moon hanging above the river mouth.

Then—without warning— **the moon split open.**

Not a thin crack. Not an optical illusion.
The moon literally *split into two pieces,* then came back together in a flash of lightning.[1]

The king stared. The guards screamed. Even the river stopped whispering.

“What just happened?” the king’s voice was hoarse.

No one answered.

The next morning, the king summoned all the palace experts. They gathered in the throne room:

- **Devan Namboothiri,** an old brahmin, expert in the Vedas and ancient astronomy.
- **Ananda Tirtha,** Buddhist monk from Vanchi, reader of celestial omens.
- **Govardhana Koya,** astronomer and monsoon researcher, a court intellectual.
- **Sulaiman al-Kodungalluri,** an Arab trader who mastered the reading of the heavens and the traditions of the Yemeni sailors.[2]

The king looked at them one by one.

“Tell me,” he said, “what did I see last night? The moon split in two, then healed itself.
I've never seen a sign like that before.”

Devan Namboothiri observes the land.
"Sire," he said, "in our literature the moon rarely gives such signs. If it is true that Your Majesty saw it, this is not a sign from ordinary nature."

Ananda Tirtha closed his eyes, as if considering the events he had just heard.
"In our teachings, an event like this shakes the world's karma. It's followed by a major change, usually the birth or arrival of a mentor."

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Govardhana Koya, the most logical among them, said, “Astronomically, there is no phenomenon that corresponds to what you saw. There is no record of an eclipse, no optical event that can explain it.”

Only Solomon finally cleared his throat softly.

“Your Majesty,” he said politely, “if you allow, there may be an explanation… but not from this earth.”

The king stared at him sharply. “Say it.”

Solomon bowed respectfully.
"In my homeland, on the Arabian Peninsula, there was news about a man in Mecca. A pious man who preached to his people. His name was... **Muhammad ibn Abdillah.** Some people called him the Prophet."[3]

The room was silent.

“And according to the news from sailors who came from Yemen,” continued Sulaiman, “that night, on the night of the full moon, the people of Mecca also witnessed the moon being split.”

The king stood slowly from his throne.

“Are you saying,” said the king in a low voice, “that the events I saw in the skies of Malabar… also occurred in the skies of Mecca?”

Solomon nodded.

“If so,” said the king, his tone turning serious, “then the heavens have shown me something.”

He walked slowly towards the window, looking at the river flowing calmly.

“If that is true… I must know for myself whether that man is truly a prophet.”

The following days, the palace was as busy as a beehive.

The king ordered the royal ships to be prepared.
Sailors from Kerala and Arabia were summoned.
The monsoon wind map is displayed.
Spices, palace gifts, silk cloth, silver bells, and **Abhaya's homemade ginger pickles** were prepared in wooden crates.

The ginger pickle, as it was intended as a royal gift, was given a special container: a **Govindan-made clay pot,** sealed with a Kerala dragon carving and topped with a silver lid.

Abhaya himself took him to the harbor.

"This is the liquid of life," said Abhaya to the captain of the ship, "in ginger there is heat of the earth, and in vinegar there is long life. Give it with respect."[4]

The sailors nodded. They knew that in Kerala culture, giving spices was an honor.

Meanwhile, the king stood on the pier, looking at the large ship ready to depart.

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"Convey my greetings to the Prophet Muhammad," he said to the royal envoy. "And tell him that I wish to meet him."

The monsoon sea rumbled gently. The wind pushed the large sails.

The journey begins.

A journey that will bring ginger from Abhaya's kitchen…
towards the house of a Prophet.

FOOTNOTE

[1] During the prophethood, the splitting of the moon was one of the most discussed miracles among the companions, but the strongest and most agreed upon narration comes from Abdullah ibn Mas'ÿd who witnessed the event directly in Mecca and is authentically narrated in *ÿaÿÿÿ al-Bukhÿrÿ* and *ÿaÿÿÿ Muslim.* Other narrations come from Anas ibn Mÿlik and Ibn 'Abbÿs, but both are *mursal* because they were not present at the time of the event. Several additional routes are also mentioned by Jÿbir ibn Muÿ'im and Hudzaifah ibn al-Yamÿn, although neither of them witnessed the event directly so the value of the narration is left to the judgment of hadith scholars. All these narrations were then compiled and explained more extensively in thematic hadith works such as *Dalÿ'il an-Nubuwwah* by al-Bayhaqÿ and Abu Nu'aym, as well as in the interpretation of verses of QS. al-Qamar:1 by al-ÿabarÿ, making it one of the most historically established traditions of prophetic miracles in early Islamic literature.

[2] The presence of Arab traders in Kerala since the early centuries AD is known through archaeological finds and ancient travel records. See: Wink, André. *Al-Hind,* Vol. I. Leiden: Brill, 1990.

[3] *The Qiÿÿat Shakarwatÿ Farmad* tradition states that the king learned of the prophetic signs through Arab traders. See: Friedmann, Yohanan. *Qiÿÿat Shakarwatÿ Farmad.* Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975.

[4] The technique of making Malabar ginger pickle and its use as a cultural offering is recorded in Kerala culinary traditions. Compare: Kurup, KKN *Cultural Heritage of Kerala.* Calicut University Press, 2003.

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****CHAPTER 3**

Transoceanic Journey
(Muziris – Dhufar – Hadhramaut)**

The morning when the royal ship was about to depart, Muziris looked like a big stage.
The harbor was filled with Tamil, Arab, Nair sailors and cargo bearers. The air is filled with the aroma of wet teak wood, coconut oil and ground spices.

Amid the din, **King Shakarwatÿ Farmad** stood on the dock, dressed in simple white robes—more a traveler than a king.
He only brought a few bodyguards, but he brought a heart full of determination.

On the side of the ship, there stood a brown-skinned Arab man, with a neat beard, with a white turban tied tightly. He was **Habib ibn Malik al-Umawi,** a trader who had been in and out of Muziris for years and was the main liaison between the king and the Arab world.[1]

"Your Majesty," he said, bowing respectfully, "the northeast monsoon is ready. The sails will catch it firmly. The journey will take about thirty days."

The king nodded. "And you will lead me to the land of the Prophet Muhammad?"

"With Allah's permission," replied Habib, "I will take Your Majesty to Hadhramaut, then from there we will go to Hijaz. In Yathrib, I knew a pious man: **Malik bin Dinar,** who later carried the Prophet's message to India."[2]

The name sounded foreign to the king, but there was something in the way Habib pronounced it that made him believe it.

Meanwhile, **Abhaya** came carrying a jug of pickled ginger.
He handed it over himself to Habib ibn Malik.

“This is not just ginger,” said Abhaya, “this is the honor of Malabar.”

Habib held the jug carefully.

“I will convey it with respect to the Prophet,” he said.

The king smiled slightly. “You haven’t even seen the Prophet’s face, Habib. How do you know he’ll accept it?”

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Habib stared at the sea for a moment.
“Because, Your Majesty… the prophets do not look at the value of things, but at the intention behind them.”

Those words touched the king more deeply than he expected.

The Journey Begins

As the white sails were raised, the wind thickened and slapped the fabric hard. The ship's ropes strained, the teak creaked, and the voices of the Arab sailors shouted:

"Bismillah! Irfa'u al-shira'!
In the name of God! Raise the sails!”

The boat moved away from the jetty, leaving behind the black sands of Kodungallur. Nair women waved their saris, and the sound of temple bells could be heard faintly, echoing the cries of sea gulls.

The king stood at the bow, looking at the slowly fading Muziris.

Habib stood beside him. "Your Majesty doesn't regret leaving the kingdom?"

The king shook his head slowly.
"What good is a crown if I don't know the truth shown by heaven?"

Ocean Turmoil

The early days of the voyage were filled with stories and jokes among the sailors. They slept on coils of rope, ate hard wheat bread, drank boiled saltwater, and occasionally enjoyed Abhaya pickled ginger as a remedy for seasickness.

“It keeps the body warm,” said one of the Arab sailors.

The Kerala sailor answered proudly, "That's ginger from our land. The land that prays to the sun."

But after ten days, the sea changed its appearance.
Dark clouds rolled in, the wind twisted like a great snake, and the waves rose as high as the palace walls.

“Riyah al-qashif!—the wind is breaking!” shouted a sailor.[3]

The ship was hit by a big storm.
King Shakarwatÿ held fast to the mast.
Habib ibn Malik led the crew in reciting prayers.
Salt water splashed into the king's face, and for a few seconds he thought the journey would end at the bottom of the ocean.

But eventually the storm passed.
And when the sun reappeared, the rocky coastline appeared—Dhufar, **the region of Southern Oman,** the gateway to Hadhramaut.

At the Arab Gate

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The ship docked in a small bay filled with the scent of frankincense and resin. On the shore, they were greeted by light-brown men—the Mahri tribe, renowned as camel riders and guardians of the desert routes.

Habib greets.
"Welcome to the land of Arabia, Your Majesty."

The king looked around.
It's a different world from Malabar—dry, sandy, but full of a serenity that's hard to describe.

From Dhufar, they continued their journey overland to **Syahr** in Hadhramaut—a seaside town which would later become the place where the king died in several versions of the story.[4]

Along the way, the king smelled the scent of frankincense trees, saw ancient valleys, and witnessed memorizers of Arabic poetry debating like Brahmins in Kerala.

Habib said, "This land has given birth to prophets long ago. Perhaps, Your Majesty is called to meet one of them."

The king did not answer.
He just looked up at the night sky—the sky that had once split in front of him.

In his heart, he knew:

This trip is not the last trip.
This is just the door to a big meeting.

A meeting between a truth-seeking king...
and a Prophet who ate the ginger he gave him.

FOOTNOTE CHAPTER 3

[1] The name “Habib ibn Malik” appears in several variants of the Cheraman Perumal story as a merchant or Arab figure who witnessed the king’s journey. His diplomatic role is a fictional development but is in keeping with the traditional narrative.

[2] Malik bin Dinar is historically considered to be the first bearer of Islam in Malabar, according to local tradition. See: Zayn al-Dÿn al-Ma'barÿ, *Tuhfat al-Mujÿhidÿn.*

[3] Ancient Arabic sailor's term; *riyah* = wind, *qashif* = to break, destroy.

[4] In the texts of the Cheraman Perumal tradition, the location of the king's death is called Shahr (Shihr) in Hadhramaut. See: Friedmann, *Qiÿÿat Shakarwatÿ Farmad.*

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****CHAPTER 4**

Ginger Pickle for the Prophet**

The journey to Yathrib took longer than the king had expected. From Shahr in Hadhramaut, the caravan passed through rocky valleys, the small market of the Mahra tribe, and vast plains illuminated by a relentless sun. But strangely, it was in the silence of the desert that the king felt closest to his goal.

Habib ibn Malik walked beside him, sometimes telling old Arabic poetry, sometimes presenting news about the noble man in Yathrib who was called the Prophet.

"He is full of love," said Habib.
"He did not raise his voice except for prayer. And he did not store food for the next day except for the poor."

The king listened carefully.
He was not a follower of that religion—not then—but his heart responded to those words with deep silence.

Arriving in Yathrib

As they approached Yathrib, the city looked different from any city the king had known.
Date palm plants grow like a guard line. The mud houses stand simply, without the opulence of Kerala palaces.

But from that place came sounds: the sounds of children reciting the Koran, the sounds of traders in the market, and the sound of a calm that cannot be described in words.

Habib lowered his head.

“This is the city of the Prophet.”

The king felt something vibrate in his chest.

The Prophet's House

The Prophet's house had no golden gates or soldiers guarding it. It was just a small room, mud walls, a palm-leaf roof, and a small yard where goats were grazed.

Habib asked permission to enter, and a few moments later a friend came out to greet them—Abu **Sa'ÿd al-Khudrÿ,** a friendly, clear-faced young man.[1]

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“Welcome,” he said. "The Messenger of Allah is receiving guests. Please come in."

When the king entered the house, he did not see the throne.
He saw a man sitting on the ground, wearing simple clothes, smiling gently at every guest who came.

That is **Muhammad ibn Abdillah ÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ.**

The king stopped.
Habib whispered to him, “It is him.”

At that moment, the king felt something that was difficult to explain.
Not light, not sound, not sight.
But *the calm,* as if all the questions in him found a place to stay.

The Prophet ÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ looked at him for a moment, then smiled.

"You have come from afar," he said in a soft voice.

The king looked down. “I came to seek the truth.”

Pickled Ginger Gift

After they sat down, Habib asked permission to present a gift.
He carries a clay jug made by Govindan—embossed with the Kerala dragon seal and a white cloth that still smells of Malabar spices.

Abu Sa'ÿd al-Khudrÿ witnessed this firsthand.
He later narrated in one hadith:

“The King of India presented the Messenger of Allah with a jug filled with ginger.
The Prophet distributed the pieces of ginger to us one by one, and he gave me one piece.”[2]

Habib opened the seal.
The aroma of ginger filled the room—fragrant, soft, with a touch of sourness and coconut oil. A scent from faraway lands, from Abhaya's kitchen, from the Periyar River, from the palaces of Kerala.

The king said, "This is food from my land, O Muhammad. And this is a sign of respect from my heart."

The Prophet ÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ took one piece of ginger.
He smelled it for a moment, then ate it with a deep smile—a smile that made the king want to cry for no reason.

He then distributed pieces of ginger to his friends.

Abu Sa'ÿd took his share gratefully.

The king felt his chest tighten with a feeling he had never known before.
He heard no thunder in the sky, saw no great miracle.
But he saw something greater than the miracle of heaven:

modesty.

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A simplicity that defeats the splendor of the palace.
A peace he never found even in the most sacred mantras of the kingdom of Kerala.

The King's Confession

After a long while, the king said in an almost trembling voice:

“I saw the moon split. I searched for answers among all the scholars and Brahmins. But there was no explanation. Now I see you, and I know: that sign is a calling.”

The Prophet ÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ looked at him gently.

"Allah gives signs to those who seek honestly," he said.
“If you see it, then that is your way.”

The king bowed his head.
He knows what he has to do.

In front of the Prophet ÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ, the king said:

“I bear witness that there is no god but Allah, and
I bear witness that you are His messenger.”

Habib closed his eyes.
Abu Sa'ÿd smiled.
And the wind of Yathrib seemed to carry the prayers far into the sky.

That night the king slept at the house of one of his friends.
For the first time in his life, he slept in a room with no carvings, no curtains, no guards.
And for the first time, he slept **carefree.**

Little did he know that fate would lead him back to Hadhramaut, where death would come to him in a strange but peaceful state.
But that night, in Yathrib's simplicity, he had found what he was looking for:

Truth.

And it all started… from
pickled ginger made by an old man named Abhaya.

FOOTNOTE CHAPTER 4

[1] Abu Sa'ÿd al-Khudrÿ is indeed present in the ginger history. See: Al-ÿÿkim, *al-Mustadrak,* no. 7190.

[2] The hadith about ginger being a gift from the king of India is found in several hadith books. See: Al-ÿÿkim, *al-Mustadrak;* Al-ÿabarÿnÿ, *al-Mu'jam al-Awsaÿ,* no. 2416; Ibn al-A'rÿbÿ, *al-Mu'jam,* no. 300.

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****CHAPTER 5**

The Death of the King in Hadhramaut**

The journey to leave Yathrib was not the journey that King Shakarwatÿ Farmad wanted.
His heart wanted to stay close to the Prophet Muhammad ÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ, learn from him, attend his gatherings, witness the revelations descend, and experience the world he had just discovered.

But he knew: the kingdom of Kerala was waiting for him, his people were waiting, and his duties as king were not finished. He wanted to return to his homeland to convey what he had seen and learned.

“Bring this teaching to your people,” the Prophet told him.
“And teach them with gentleness.”

The king prostrated himself.

And the next morning, he started his journey home.

Heading South

Habib ibn Malik accompanied the king on the long journey to Hadhramaut.
They passed limestone valleys, barren plains, and small villages filled with the scent of burning frankincense every morning.

Throughout the journey, the king remained silent.
He often stared at the horizon, as if trying to store every detail of the Arab land in his memories.

Sometimes he said softly,
"I hope to come back to see him again."

Habib replied,
"If Allah ordains, then Your Majesty will return."

But deep down, Habib felt an anxiety he didn't understand.

Arriving in Syahr

After several weeks of travel, they arrived in **Shahr,** the port city of Hadhramaut famous for its tall ships and spice markets.
Shahr was a harsh city: the winds were dry, the heat was oppressive, but on the Indian Ocean trade routes, it was a vital hub.

It was in this city that the king began to feel his body weaken.

On the first day, he only had a mild cough.
On the second day, he had difficulty walking.
And on the third day, he had a high fever.

Local healers were called in. They prescribed a concoction of honey and black cumin, but his condition worsened.
continues to decline.

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Habib sat beside her, holding her hand.
"Sire," he said in a trembling voice, "be patient. We will soon return to Kerala."

The king smiled weakly.
“Habib… I have no regrets. I have seen what I wanted to see.”

The Last Days of the King

The king's room was a simple limestone chamber. There was only one small window through which the morning light shone, illuminating his gaunt face.

On the fourth day, he asked for the window to be opened wider.

“I want to see the Arabian sky one last time.”

Habib opened it.
The hot air came in, but the king smiled.

“This sky,” he said, “was the one that showed me the sign… of the split moon.”

His eyes were staring into the distance.
He remembered the balcony of his palace, remembered the Periyar River, remembered the roar that night when the light in the sky split like a sword light.

Then he remembered the Prophet's face—his gentle smile, his loving eyes.

“Habib,” he said softly, “there will be a day when people from Kerala will come here. Tell them… that I have come not to seek worldly glory… but truth.”

Tears rolled down Habib's cheeks.

“Your Majesty,” he said, “you have chosen the right path.”

Final Message

As evening approached, the king asked something surprising:

“Get me the rest of the pickled ginger.”

Habib was stunned.
The jug is still kept in a wooden box, a little remains after being given to the Prophet Muhammad ÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ and his companions.

Habib brought it.

The king closed his eyes as he smelled the aroma.

“This,” he said, “is the scent of my land.”

He held the jug as if holding a piece of the past—the time when he was still king in Muziris, the time when he didn't know where fate would take him.

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“If I don't come back,” he said softly, “tell my people… that I went to seek the light.

And I found it.”

Death in a Foreign Land

As the sun set that day, King Shakarwatÿ Farmad breathed his last.
With his face facing the sky.
With a faint smile.
With his hands still clutching the cloth wrapping the ginger jug from Kerala.

Habib ibn Malik closed his eyes and read a prayer for him.

The news spread quickly in Syahr.
The Arabs who knew the king's story wept.
The sailors who had been with the king lit oil lamps along the pier.

He was buried in Syahr, in a small tomb facing the Qibla.
On his tombstone it will be written:

“Here resides the King of Malabar Who
came seeking truth And found it
in the presence of the Prophet.”

The Remaining History

Centuries later, a writer from Hadhramaut named **Sha'ir ibn Hanzalah al-Shihri** recorded the story in his manuscript, writing:

“I witnessed the death of the King of India.
He came with eyes that sought, And he
went with a heart that had found.”[1]

Meanwhile, in Kerala, the people waited for the king who never returned.
And one day, some Arab men came with a message:

"Your king died in a state of faith."

It was the day when Kerala remembered that its history had once touched Arab lands.
And it all stems from one event:

Pickled ginger that crosses the ocean, and the heart of a king guided by light.

FOOTNOTE CHAPTER 5

[1] Several traditional texts mention Syahr (Shihr) in Hadhramaut as the place where the king died. The fictional author *Sha'ir ibn Hanzalah* is based on Hadhramaut naming conventions, as a representation of local recording traditions.

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****CHAPTER 6**

Back to Kerala —
Malik bin Dinar and the Light of the South**

Dusk at Syahr harbor seemed to paint the sky a golden color when **Malik bin Dinar** arrived with several of his friends from Yathrib. He was a tall man with a calm face, a soft beard, and calm eyes that reflected the depth of his knowledge and long wanderings.

They came carrying the mandate of the Prophet Muhammad ÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ:
preached Islam to the coast of India — a land that had touched the heart of a king.

Habib ibn Malik greeted them with a sad face.

Malik bin Dinar asked, “Where is King Shakarwati Farmad? We were told that he would return to his country with us.”

Habib lowered his head, his eyes filled with tears.

"He has returned to Allah."

A long silence enveloped the room.
Malik bin Dinar closed his eyes, reciting a prayer for the king who died far from his homeland.

“May Allah glorify him,” he said in a low voice.
“He came seeking the truth, and he went away carrying it.”

Carrying out the King's Will

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Habib then showed the cloth that had once wrapped the jar of pickled ginger — the only small object the king held before his death.
Malik bin Dinar held it with respect.

“The scent of ginger… from the soil,” he said softly, as if sensing the king’s closeness in the cloth.

Habib nodded.
"Before he died, the king ordered that the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) be conveyed to his people."

Malik stared at the desert that was reddened by the setting sun.

“Then we will return to Kerala,” he said.
“We will continue his legacy.”

Sailing to Muziris

Several weeks later, the group of Malik bin Dinar and his companions departed from Syahr towards the Malabar coast.
They sailed with a caravan of sailors carrying resin, frankincense, dates and leather from Yemen.

The monsoon winds propelled the great sails, and the sea that once guided the king now carried the heirs of his treatise.

On board the ship, Habib ibn Malik sat rereading the king's travel notes.
Every word reminded him of the king's smiling face as he watched the Prophet eat a piece of ginger made by Abhaya.

Sometimes the sea breeze carries a faint scent of ginger as if it still lingers in the fabric.

Muziris Welcomes Guests from the West

As the ship approached the Muziris pier, the sight was like welcoming a group from the past:

- the sound of the spice market,
- sandalwood aroma,
- Nair sailors joking while tying ropes,
- and Kerala women carrying ginger baskets on their heads.

But there is one thing that is different:

the people are still waiting for the return of their king.
However, the king did not get off the ship.

Instead, what came down was a man with an Arab face, with gentle eyes - Malik bin Dinar - carrying a long message from a distant land.

Meeting with Kerala Palace Council

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Malik bin Dinar was brought to the Kodungallur palace.
The Kerala royals gathered — their faces tense, curious, and some in disbelief.

The chairman of the council, an old man in white silk clothes, asked:

"Have you come with news about our king?"

Malik nodded.
He stood tall in the center of the hall, his grave voice clear.

"I came with a message from him."

The room fell silent for a moment.

"Your king," continued Malik, "set out in search of the truth. He reached Yathrib and met the Prophet Muhammad ÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ ÿÿÿÿ. He accepted the light of Islam with a calm heart. But on his way home, he fell ill in Syahr, Hadhramaut. He died in a state of faith."

Some of the nobles held their breath.
Some cried.
Others don't believe it.

“Is this true?” asked a minister, his voice breaking.

Malik took something out of his roll of cloth.

This is the cloth that wrapped the ginger jar made by Abhaya — the last cloth the king touched.

When the cloth was opened, a faint aroma of ginger spread through the hall.
The aroma from Abhaya's kitchen.
The aroma of the land of Kerala.

“This,” said Malik, “is the last relic he holds.
He wanted you to know:
he's home… but not in his body. Home… with this message.”

And the entire palace sank into silence.

Abhaya Hears the News

In the palace kitchen, Abhaya was preparing spices when the news reached her.
He stopped, the knife in his hand shaking.

"He...died?" his voice was almost inaudible.

When he was invited to the hall, Malik bin Dinar honored him as the person who made the ginger gift.

Malik said, "Your gift reached the Prophet. He ate it, and shared it with us."

Tears trickled down Abhaya's cheeks.
He covered his face with both hands, sobbing silently.

“That… was the greatest honor of my life.”

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Malik patted his shoulder gently.

“Sometimes a person changes the world not with a sword, but with ginger.”

Abhaya smiled through her tears — that sentence would stay with her for the rest of her life.

The First Mosques in Kerala

With the support of nobles who were still loyal to the king, Malik bin Dinar established the first mosques in Kerala:

- **Cheraman Juma Mosque** in Kodungallur
- Mosque in Mangalore
- Mosque in Barkur
- Mosque in Kasaragod
- And others until the total narrated reached 20 mosques[1]

In every place he said:

“We come with a message from your king.
He asked that this light reach the earth where he was born.”

And the people of Kerala, always open to traders from faraway worlds, accepted the teachings with tender hearts.

Legends That Became History

Years passed.
The name of Cheraman Perumal — the king who saw the moon split — continues to be told from house to house, from port to port.

And the sailors' grandchildren still say:

“Once upon a time, a king of ours went to Arabia.
He saw something in the sky, and
he found light in his heart.”

At the palace, Abhaya continues to pickle ginger — but every time she smells it, she senses something more than just spice:

memory.

And in the Hadhramaut desert, a small tomb remains standing, marked by a simple stone.

It says there:

“The King of the Kingdom of the Spice
Kingdom Who came bearing questions
And returned bearing light.”

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FOOTNOTE CHAPTER 6

[1] Kerala tradition credits Malik ibn Dinar as the founder of many early mosques in Malabar. Sources: Zayn al-Dÿn al-Ma'barÿ, *Tuhfat al-Mujÿhidÿn;* also oral traditions of the Mappila community in Malabar.

****CHAPTER 7**

Abhaya and the History That Evaporates Like the Aroma of Ginger**

Ever since the news of King Shakarwatÿ Farmad's death reached Kerala, the kitchen of Kodungallur palace has never been the same for **Mÿtrÿga Valiya Thÿrattil Abhaya.**
The room, once always full of the laughter of cooks and servants, was now filled with a strange silence — as if every clay jug remembered the face of the king who did not return.

Abhaya stood in front of a teak table, looking at the freshly harvested young ginger.
His hands trembled as he touched it.

“This scent…” he murmured, “…is the scent that once carried him away.”

He began slicing ginger — a move that had become his ritual for decades.
But this time there was something different.
Each slice of ginger reflected the light of the oil lamp, and Abhaya felt as if she saw the shadow of the king on its surface.

“Abhaya Asan,” someone called.

He turned his head.

At the kitchen door stood **Malik bin Dinar,** the man who had come with the sad news.

“Am I bothering you?” Malik asked gently.

“No,” Abhaya replied. “I’m just… trying to continue what I was doing before.”

Malik approached, looking at the table full of ginger.

“Your king,” he said, “once told me that food was the earliest human language. And what you make… has become a language between two worlds.”

Abhaya was silent.
He never considered himself important.
He was a man from a family of spice farmers, not a Brahmin, not a nobleman. But that day he felt as if his life had touched something greater.

“Can I see where you made the pickles first?” Malik asked.

Abhaya nodded, then led Malik into the storage room—a cool, brick-walled room, lined with wooden shelves filled with *kalasam* and *bharani jugs.*
Some were still covered in cloth, like arms holding secrets.

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In one corner of the room, Abhaya opened a teak wood box.
The contents were **the sibling vessel** of the jug he had once sent to the King.
This jug is made by Govindan, with the same Kerala dragon carved.

Malik touched the carving slowly.
"This is what it looks like..." he said.

“I made two,” answered Abhaya. "One is for the king. One… is for memory."

They both fell silent for a long time.

Malik and Abhaya on the Periyar River

That afternoon, Malik bin Dinar invited Abhaya to walk to the banks of the Periyar River, where the king had stood when he saw the moon split.

The river rippled gently, reflecting the golden light of the setting sun.

“It was here,” Abhaya said quietly, “that the sign occurred. We did not understand it… until the news came from your land.”

Malik stared at the water.
"Indeed, Allah directs whom He wills."

They sat on a large rock.

“I always thought,” Abhaya told Malik, “that small jobs never change the world.
But now… I'm not sure.”

Malik smiled.

“Never underestimate the small things,” he said.
“An ant can divert a king's steps.
And a piece of ginger can be a sign of a journey that connects two continents.”

Abhaya lowered her head.
A few tears fell to the ground.

"I miss him," he said.

Malik put his hand on the ginger processor's shoulder.

“And that longing is proof of your love.
A love that will be remembered longer than the life of a kingdom.”

The Aroma That Becomes Memories

That night, in the dimly lit palace kitchen, Abhaya lit an oil lamp.
He opened the last jar of ginger he kept — ginger he made with the same hands that made gifts for a Prophet.

The aroma of ginger rose into the air.
Warm.

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Gentle.
Bitter sweet.
And full of memories.

Abhaya said to herself:

“This scent has traveled further than any human in my kingdom.”

And he understood one thing he never realized:

Sometimes history is not written by kings and heroes, but
by little hands who never appear in the records.

Narrative Shift — Back to the Time of Musonnif Khan

Hundreds of years passed.
The kingdom collapsed.
Muziris Harbor was submerged by river flooding.
Abhaya's name is lost from the historical record — but not from the trail he left behind.

And now, in the foyer of an old house in Tellicherry, Musonnif Khan closes his manuscript.
In front of him, **Asrovin Taro** sat without blinking.

“That,” said Musonnif, “is the end of the king’s story. But not the end of the scent of ginger.”

Asrovin nodded slowly.
“This story… it feels so real, Master.”

Musonnif smiled.

"Historical truth is sometimes blurred. But the truth of feeling... is never blurred."

“And Abhaya, Master? Why is there no record of him?”

Musonnif lit the oil lamp beside him.

"Because history only records those who wield swords," he said softly.
“Not the one holding the kitchen knife.”

Asrovin was stunned.

“But… wasn’t that kitchen knife the one that made the Prophet a gift?”

Musonnif nodded.

“Yes. And that's why I chose to tell this story.
So that the name Abhaya… doesn't disappear like a scent that evaporates.”

Asrovin looked at his old teacher.

“Teacher… did this story really happen?”

Musonnif covered the manuscript with his palm.

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“Historical truth… let the experts debate it.
But the truth of the soul…
it can only be felt by those who hear with their hearts.”

He looked at Asrovin deeply.

“Now… does your heart hear?”

Asrovin took a deep breath, and for the first time, he sensed the faint scent of ginger as if flowing from the pages of the manuscript.

He replied:

“Yes, Master… my heart hears.”

****CHAPTER 8 — EPILOGUE**

The Aroma That Never Dies**

The night rain fell on Tellicherry, tapping on the tin roof with a rhythm that sounded like the whisper of a bygone era. **Musonnif Khan** closed an old manuscript on his lap. The oil lamp beside him trembled, as if about to go out, but continued to hold on.

Meanwhile in front of him, **Asrovin Taro** sat up straight, his face no longer that of a student— but like someone who has just returned from a long journey, a journey not traveled by the feet, but by the heart.

“Teacher…” Asrovin said quietly, “what remains of this story after centuries?”

Musonnif touched the cover of the manuscript, his fingers tracing the time-worn wood carvings.

“Just a scent,” he replied softly.
“History builds empires and destroys cities.
But the aromas—the scent of ginger, coconut oil, wet earth—remain in human memory long beyond the limits of life.”

He looked at Asrovin with a look in his eyes that contained something like exhaustion… and happiness.

“Do you know why I kept the story of King Shakarwati Farmad?”
Asrovin shook his head slowly.

“Because this story is not about the miracle of the split moon.
It's not about a trip to Arabia.
Not about the first mosques.”

He leaned over.

“This story… is about a little person that history never wrote about.”

“Asrovin,” he continued, “you must remember Abhaya. Remember Govindan. Remember the little hands that made the jugs, sliced the ginger, stirred the oil.

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They may not have been recorded in the manuscript.
But they are the reason this story is possible.”

Asrovin felt his throat tighten.

“Teacher… do you think Abhaya knew that the pickles she made would become part of history?”

Musonnif shook his head, his eyes staring off into the distance.

“No one knows when he is making history.
They just work with their hearts.
And history chooses who it wants to remember.”

Their reverie was broken by the sound of thunder far out at sea. The smell of rain wafts into the house, bringing with it the alluring sensation of wet earth.

Suddenly Asrovin said, "Teacher... may I see the jug?"

Musonnif smiled.

“I knew you would ask that.”

He rose slowly and walked to an old teak cupboard. From it, he pulled out **a small clay jug,** simple in shape but full of character. On the side of its neck was a faint Kerala **dragon motif** —the same one Govindan had created centuries earlier.

“I found it in an antique market in Kochi,” Musonnif said. “Is it an authentic jug? I don’t know.”
But… sometimes objects don’t need to be original to convey the truth of the atmosphere.”

Asrovin held it carefully, as if holding a fragile baby bird.

“Teacher… may I open it?”

"Please."

Asrovin opened slowly.
There was no ginger in it—just dry earth and a faint, very faint scent, like the remnants of oil that once touched the spice.

But the scent was enough to give him goosebumps.

“It's like… the story is still alive,” he said.

Musonnif smiled faintly.

“Because stories never die.
It just changes shape.”

On That Night…

As Asrovin returned home that night, he walked in the gentle rain. The wet streets reflected the light of the lamps, and the night breeze carried the familiar scent of the sea.

Halfway through the journey, he stopped.

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From somewhere, whether from imagination or memories born of stories, he smelled another scent:

ginger.
Warm ginger.
Ginger that once crossed the ocean.
Ginger that was once in the hands of a Prophet.

He closed his eyes.
And for the first time, he understood what his teacher meant:

A story told with heart never dies.
It lives in scents, in memories, in the whispers of rain and wind.

That night, under the small umbrella and the wet sky, Asrovin Taro made a promise in his heart:

"I will write this story.
I will bring Abhaya back to life.
I will make the king's journey back to the sea.
I will make the world smell the aroma of ginger again."

And his steps felt lighter as he walked home.

Because the big story… has just begun.

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G. Hadhramaut & South Arabian Traditions

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